

Research Paper

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Russian State Mobilization

Moving the Country on to a War Footing



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Summary

- The term *mobilizatsiya* – ‘mobilization’ – features increasingly prominently in the Russian policy discussion. It describes a coordinated attempt on the part of the state to address an array of evolving security threats – in both narrow and broad senses – to Russia. In part, this reflects a widespread debate about the looming possibility, perhaps even inevitability, of war.
- In the view of many Russian officials, politicians and experts, the international system is becoming increasingly unstable, with ‘hotspots’ emerging in many regions – including in Russia’s immediate neighbourhood. There is thus concern at the prospect of a 21st century of wider international instability and an ‘arc of crisis’ around Russia. Specific perceived threats include emergent international competition for resources, an international arms race that is well under way, and the possibility of a US-led attempt at regime change in Russia.
- Russian state mobilization prioritizes security concerns in strategic thinking, with economic and other issues subsumed into them. It entails the implementation of emergency measures designed to test the Russian system of power and prepare it to meet the threats identified by the leadership. Mobilization is thus primarily about *readiness*.
- Mobilization measures include substantial investments in arms procurement, in improved conditions of service in the armed forces and defence industry, and in command-and-control systems and enhanced coordination between ministries. They also entail an intense programme of exercises involving the domestic security services and the armed forces.
- The mobilization programme faces ongoing problems – due both to the scale of measures required and to the challenges of balancing priorities at a time of economic stagnation, even recession. In particular, there appears to be an unresolved internal debate over force structure, with some voices in government and the military advocating the maintenance of a large cadre of reservists (i.e. a variant on the old-style mass-mobilization approach) and others emphasizing the development of a smaller professional force at constant combat-readiness.
- The presence of competing visions of mobilization is an inefficient use of resources. It impedes the development of coherent policies, as plans and reforms often meet resistance from vested interests. In effect, the current reality of Russian mobilization is more like ‘mobilization, with difficulty’. None the less, for all the challenges involved, mobilization represents a significant longer-term trend in Russian strategic power creation.
- The West can do little to prevent Russian mobilization *per se*, but a more sophisticated assessment of the process and its implications would aid the development of more effective policies of deterrence and dialogue. Understanding the nature of this mobilization should help to inform planning at NATO’s Warsaw summit in July 2016, an event that will play a key role in shaping the Alliance’s ongoing strategy for dealing with a more muscular Russia. In particular, NATO needs to recognize that Russia’s current mobilization efforts are not yet complete and will likely continue to affect Russia’s military effectiveness, posture and strategy through 2017–20.

1. Introduction

This paper addresses Russia's mobilization. It outlines how Moscow sees a world of increasing instability and competition. It considers how the Russian leadership is responding to these concerns, and reflects on what appears to be a series of measures designed to prepare Russia to face potential conflict, even war.

These are in effect emergency measures, since the Russian leadership is well aware that war is a test of society and that, despite the recent military experience gained in Ukraine and Syria, Russia is not ready for this test. Threats are multiplying, while Russia's system is often dysfunctional. But what does Russian state mobilization actually mean? How is it manifested in policy terms?

This paper sketches out an understanding of Russian state mobilization, framing its evolution from a traditional 19th- or 20th-century style of 'national' mobilization into a series of measures adapted to the security challenges of the 21st century. It sets out what is meant by Russian state mobilization, including a brief historical overview. It goes on to explore how Moscow sees the world, illustrating the Kremlin's concerns about the presence of an 'arc of crisis' around Russia. Then it looks at specific features of Russian state mobilization, particularly at the security and military aspects of what are in effect efforts to move the country on to a permanent war footing. The paper concludes by assessing the progress to date of mobilization overall, and by considering the implications for Western thinking on Russia – in particular, mobilization's relevance to understandings of likely Russian trajectories in the next two to three years.

Should it matter to Western audiences whether Russia is mobilizing or not? The simple answer is yes. It is important for the West not only because the scale and depth of these measures go far beyond the 'hybrid war' concept that has come to dominate Western thinking about Russia since 2014. It also matters because the Russian transformation is not yet complete. The Russian armed forces are in a period of experimentation and learning, and, as demonstrated by their actions in Syria, are evolving quite rapidly. Moreover, Russia and the West continue to be separated by numerous disagreements, particularly (but not only) over the future of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. As Russia's transformation takes place, the questions posed by these disagreements will become ever starker.

The term mobilization is seldom used in the Euro-Atlantic strategic or security lexicon. In fact, since the end of the Cold War Western societies have largely *demobilized* and increasingly appear to be demilitarized. As one observer has recently put it, the United States and United Kingdom may invoke the moral language of great national wars when embarking on military action, but in practice going to war means applying military power while encouraging the general population to look on as passive observers. The US response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 was not to urge citizens to mobilize into an extraordinary state of supreme emergency, but the opposite – an attempt to make the citizens spectators of a continuous projection of power. War therefore does not trouble the large majority of ordinary people; indeed their *inattention* to it is what is most notable. This is the very opposite of the total wars of the 20th century, in which states sought to mobilize a

nationalist, conscripted population.¹ Even the war in Ukraine in 2014 – which has challenged the orthodox post-Cold War view that interstate war in Europe would not happen again, and has led Western officials to suggest that the Euro-Atlantic area is surrounded by an ‘arc of crisis’ and involved in a ‘new Cold War’ – has not altered the wider picture of a demilitarized West.

Elsewhere, however, even in the wider European area, things look very different. The Ukrainian authorities responded to the outbreak of war by ordering a full military mobilization in March 2014, involving the calling up and training of reserves. Kyiv subsequently imposed several further waves of mobilization on the population, seeking to draft tens of thousands of able-bodied men for front-line service in the armed forces. The experience has been troubled, with heavy casualties among the conscripts, and much draft dodging and desertion – which has led to increased punishment for draft dodgers, including imprisonment, and a debate about the need for professional armed forces.²

In Russia, there is much debate about international instability, and even about the supposed ‘inevitability’ of war.³ The Russian term for mobilization – *mobilizatsiya* – often features in discussions about the current economic, political and international security environment. For years experts and academics have debated the need for a ‘mobilization course of development’ for Russia.⁴ More recently, prominent media outlets have debated the economic situation and whether the finance ministry is preparing a ‘mobilization budget’;⁵ whether the leadership is mobilizing the political system;⁶ and whether the threats posed to Russia by the United States and international terrorism mean that Russians are living in a ‘mobilization time’, in which there is a need to build a ‘special system of working with the population’.⁷

Party politicians, including from United Russia (the dominant parliamentary party) and the Communist Party (the major nationwide parliamentary opposition), and prominent officials, such as Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov, have spoken of

¹ Porter, P. (2015), ‘Soldiers Fighting Alone’, *Parameters*, 45(3); Dudziak, M. (2012), *War Time: An Idea, its History, its Consequences*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 7–8, 131–32, 135.

² Demirjian, K. (2015), ‘Ukraine’s military mobilization undermined by draft dodgers’, *Washington Post*, 25 April 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/ukraines-military-mobilization-undermined-by-draft-dodgers/2015/04/25/fc3a5818-d236-11e4-8b1e-274d670aa9c9_story.html.

³ Pavlovsky, G. (2015), *Sistema RF. Istochniki rossiiskovo strategicheskovo povedeniya* [The Russian Federation System: Origins of Russian Strategic Behaviour], Moscow: Evropa, pp. 110–18.

⁴ Kortunov, S. (2008), ‘Innovatsionni tip razvitiya i mobilizatsiya – eta dva puti, kotorie kardinalno protivorechat drug drugu’ [Innovative type of development and mobilization – these are two paths that drastically contradict each other], Liberty.ru, <http://liberty.ru/groups/experts/Innovatsionnyj-tip-razvitiya-i-mobilizatsiya-eto-dva-puti-kotorye-kardinalno-protivorechat-drug-drugu>;

⁵ Kalashnikov, M. (2013), *Mobilizatsionnaya Ekonomika: Mozhet li Rossiya oboitis’ bez zapada?* [Mobilization Economics. Can Russia manage without the West?], Moscow: Algoritm; Delyagin, M., Glaziev, S. and Fursov, A. (2013), *Strategiya “Bolshovo ryvka”* [‘Major Breakthrough’ Strategy], Moscow: Algoritm. Contains an introductory section entitled ‘Mobilizatsionni proekt – osnovnaya predposylka strategii “bolshovo ryvka”’ [Mobilization project – founding premises of a ‘major breakthrough’ strategy]. Sergei Glaziev is an adviser to President Putin.

⁶ ‘Mobilizatsiya bez shoka’ [Mobilization without Shock], *Expert*, 29 (908), 14 July 2014; ‘MinFin vnyos v pravitelstvo mobilizatsionni byudzhzet’ [The Ministry of Finance submitted the mobilization budget to the Government], *Vedomosti*, 17 September 2014, <http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2014/09/17/mobilizatsionnyj-byudzhzet>.

⁷ Ushakova, D. and Chernov, M. (2014), ‘Putin gotovitsa k mobilizatsii’ [Putin is preparing for mobilization], Lenta.ru, 12 May 2014, <http://lenta.ru/articles/2014/05/12/putinnaz/>; ‘Mirovaya mobilizatsiya – kovo i shto udalos VVP mobilizirovat v Rossii – ob etom možno sporit’ [Worldwide mobilization – who and what VVP managed to mobilize in Russia – this is debatable], *Vedomosti*, 31 March 2014.

⁸ Gracheva, T. (2015), ‘Kogda obyavlyat mobilizatsiyu’ [When to announce mobilization], *Voенно-Promyshlenniy Kurier*, No. 35 (601), 16 September 2015, www.vpk-news.ru/articles/27018; Anatolii Ermolin, a retired FSB Vympel officer, speaking on ‘Personalno vash’ programme, *Ekho Moskvy*, 14 November 2015, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalnovash/1658164-echo/>.

mobilization as part of Russia's anti-crisis plan – as the means to consolidate society, improve state administration and respond to a challenging, even threatening, international environment.⁸

Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, has used the term in various contexts. In a 2013 speech he emphasized that it was 'only by mobilizing all the resources at our disposal, both administrative and financial' that Russia would be able to respond to grave long-term challenges.⁹ Eighteen months later, in contrast, he appeared to suggest that the West was mobilizing when he said: 'What business, economic expediency and pragmatism can we speak of when we hear slogans such as "the homeland is in danger", "the free world is under threat", and "democracy is in jeopardy"? And so everyone needs to mobilize. This is a real mobilization policy.'¹⁰ After Turkey shot down a Russian Su-24 bomber in November 2015, the Kremlin announced that the president was 'fully mobilized' in responding to the challenge.¹¹

Potential Russian aggression, particularly a possible attack on the Baltic states, is certainly a central theme of the debate in the West. Much effort has been put into proving Russian military involvement in Ukraine and reflecting on Russian 'hybrid war'. Prominent NATO officials have contrasted the increase in Russian defence expenditure with the decline in such expenditure in NATO member states. Philip Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR), has suggested that Russia is 'revanchist' and poses a challenge that is 'global, not regional, and enduring not temporary'.¹² Others have suggested that Russia poses a major, even existential, threat to the United States. These are serious questions. But they are a small part of a deeper and more complex issue, and emphasize Western concerns rather than actual Russian developments. Furthermore, they overlook the doubts and difficulties that Moscow faces and assume a degree of coherence and effectiveness in Russia that is often absent. Moreover, if some observers have explored the heightened perceptions of threat in Russian thinking,¹³ few in the West have recently examined the phenomenon and concept of mobilization.¹⁴

Two caveats are worth making at the outset. First, 'empathy' is not synonymous with 'sympathy'. Trying to understand the world through Russian eyes is not an attempt to argue for its policies, or that disagreements should be simply overlooked. Russia may be on the strategic defensive for the

⁸ United Russia Website (2015), 'Yarovaya: Antikrizisnyi plan – eto eshche i meri mobilizatsii' [Yarovaya: The Anti-crisis Plan – this is also a measure for mobilization], 20 February 2015, <http://er.ru/news/128055>. Irina Yarovaya is the coordinator of United Russia's patriotic platform, and head of the Russian parliament's committee on security and anti-corruption. See also RT (2014), 'DM Shoigu asks Putin to launch obligatory military training for all Russian governors', 25 November 2014, <https://www.rt.com/politics/208551-russia-governors-military-training/>. Vladimir Komoyedov, a member of the Communist Party, is the head of the parliament's defence committee. Gerasimov, V. (2013), 'Tsennost nauki v predvidenniye' [The value of science in anticipation], *Voenno-Promyshlenniy Kurier*, 27 February 2013, <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>.

⁹ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2013), 'Speech at the enlarged meeting of government', 31 January 2013, <http://eng.new.kremlin.ru/news/4915>.

¹⁰ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), 'Zasedaniye Mezhdunarodnovo diskussionnovo kluba "Valdai"' [A Meeting of the International Discussion Club 'Valdai'], 24 October 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>.

¹¹ Tass News (2015), 'Peskov: Reaktsiya rukovodstva Turtsii na intsident Su-24 napominaet teatra absurd' [Peskov: the reaction of the Turkish authorities on the Su-24 shootdown incident resembles the theatre of the absurd], 28 November 2015, <http://tass.ru/politika/2481443>.

¹² Pellerin, C. (2015), 'Breedlove: Russia, Violent Extremism Challenge Europe', DoD News, 25 February 2015, <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/604173>.

¹³ Giles, K. (2015), 'Russia and the West: The Longer View', and Pynnoniemi, K. (2015), 'Analysis of the Signals and Assumptions Embedded in Russia's Adjusted Security Doctrines', both in 'Russia and Regime Security', *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 173, 12 October 2015.

¹⁴ Exceptions include Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, commander of the US Army in Europe, who suggested in February 2015 that Russia was 'mobilizing in preparation for a potential conflict by the end of the decade'. Ahmari, S. (2015), 'The View from NATO's Russian Front.

Interview with Ben Hodges', *Wall Street Journal*, 6 February 2015; and Silvana Malle, Julian Cooper and Richard Connolly, contributors to a project entitled 'Militant Russia'. Cooper stated that since the annexation of Crimea and conflict in eastern Ukraine, Russia has clearly been in a state of heightened military readiness, and the level of activity suggests that the country is at an early stage of its mobilization procedure.

Cooper, J. (2015), 'The Military face of "bellicose Russia"', *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 6, November–December 2015, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/130>.

time being – reacting to international events and unready for a major war – but its relationship with the West is increasingly politically and militarily competitive. Incomplete mobilization and the shortcomings of Russian military capabilities to date are no grounds for complacency about the challenge to Euro-Atlantic security either now or in the medium term. Indeed, given the chronic disagreements between Russia and the West, tension is likely to increase. These fundamental differences are well documented and will not be explored here. Competition is often the principal cause of great power conflict, and war often breaks out because decision-makers fall victim to cognitive dissonance or confirmation bias. Wars are not always the result of deliberate policy, and can be caused by miscalculation.¹⁵

An empathetic approach emphasizes the unique features of Moscow's thinking. For example, the debate about international security in Russia appears superficially similar to the Western one – with much discussion about a 'new Cold War', terrorism, war in Syria and cyber security.¹⁶ Yet the thrust and detail of the Russian versions of these discussions are so often substantially different from versions outside Russia that some of the views outlined below will appear surprising, preposterous even, to a Western audience. This does not mean, however, that such views are not seriously held in Moscow, or that they are not based on rational Russian calculations.

This has policy implications. Because different conclusions are drawn from the same evidence, the causes of, evolution of and potential solutions to questions are understood differently. Thus even interests that the Euro-Atlantic area and Russia may appear to have in common, such as fighting Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), are *not* in fact shared. This limits the potential for cooperation, and exacerbates the possibility for mutual misunderstanding.

The second caveat is that state mobilization relates to action across government, and thus potentially encompasses many sectors. These include transport, communications, energy, food and agriculture, and industry, as well as the military and security spheres. Contemporary Russian mobilization is not a purely military matter, in other words, and emergency measures being implemented in economic, political and social areas are an important element of it.¹⁷ The leadership is applying pressure across the system to try to make it function more effectively, including through the rotation of senior officials (involving both firings and 'retirings'), recruitments and promotions. Likewise, the underlying reasons for the necessity of this pressure – the often dysfunctional nature of Russian power – could merit a separate analysis of their own. Some of these issues have been covered elsewhere,¹⁸ however, and while the economic and defence-industrial elements of state mobilization are briefly addressed, the focus below is on elucidating the security and military aspects of mobilization.

¹⁵ Coker, C. (2015), *The Improbable War: China, the United States and the Logic of Great Power Conflict*, London: Hurst, p. 2.

¹⁶ Prokhanov, A., Glaziev, S. et al. (2015), *Kholodnaia voina 2.0: Strategiya russkoi pobedy* [Cold War 2.0: Strategy of Russia's Victory], Moscow: Knizhni Mir; Korovin, V. (2014), *Tretaya mirovaya setevaya voina* [Network World War III], St Petersburg: Piter.

¹⁷ As discussed below, the strategic exercises which Moscow has been conducting include the participation of civilian organizations, ministries and agencies. The ministries of health and agriculture participated in the September 2015 exercises, for instance, designed, according to Defence Minister Shoigu, to 'check the readiness for fulfilling tasks in the conditions of wartime'.

¹⁸ For an exploration of some of the ongoing economic and socio-political emergency measures, as well as the long-term flaws in the system, see Monaghan, A. (2014), *Defibrillating the Vertikal? Putin and Russian Grand Strategy*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/defibrillating-vertikal-putin-and-russian-grand-strategy>.

2. What Does Russian State Mobilization Mean?

Given its lengthy absence from the Western discussion, it is worth reflecting on what state mobilization means. This is partly because the word has specific historical connotations in Western strategic and military thinking. It is often seen in terms of the Napoleonic *levée en masse* idea of a ‘nation in arms’, and of the call for mass volunteerism (and conscription) to defend the motherland. The theme has been prominent recently because of the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. Mobilization is also often understood as something that happens *after* war has been declared. An example is the concept of ‘train timetable’ mobilization, in which a country’s ability to mobilize is to some extent predetermined, and thus constrained, by existing logistical structures – making it hard to respond flexibly to new circumstances.

While both of these understandings are relevant in that imperial Russian and Soviet military thinking drew on them (the Soviet experience in the Second World War¹⁹ is a prime example of the ‘nation in arms’ and ‘defence of the motherland’), and ‘train times’ are an important feature of Russian military mobilization today, Russian state mobilization is evolving well beyond this framework.

When ‘mobilization’ has featured in the Western post-Cold War discussion about Russia and the post-Soviet region, it is its popular aspects that have mainly received attention. For example, some commentators have focused on opposition protests mobilizing against the leadership using social media. This was most apparent, for instance, during the Russian anti-government demonstrations in the winter and spring of 2011–12, and during the colour revolutions and ‘Euromaidan’ movement in Kyiv in 2004 and 2013–14.²⁰ This sort of action has a strong progressive element to it, and draws on a tradition with roots in the political left that sees mobilization in potentially revolutionary terms: as a result, it is closely related in this context to the emergence of political consciousness and enfranchisement.²¹

Others look at how the Russian authorities have sought to bolster the popularity of the regime through what might be termed ‘patriotic mobilization’. This, they suggest, is effectively a ‘counter-mobilization’ movement, establishing pro-leadership organizations and prosecuting aggressive propaganda campaigns to encourage patriotism, even nationalism. Some observers have suggested that if there was an intensification of anti-government protest during 2011–12, and a countervailing patriotic mood during the war in Ukraine and subsequent increase in tensions with the West, both

¹⁹ The Second World War is known in Russian as the ‘Great Patriotic War’.

²⁰ Greene, S. (2014), *Moscow in Movement: Power and Opposition in Putin’s Russia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press; Onuch, O. (2014), *Mapping Mass Mobilization: Understanding Revolutionary Movements in Argentina and Ukraine*, London: Palgrave MacMillan. This continues a longer discussion about the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union (nationalistic popular mobilizations against the Soviet leadership). It also fits into a wider field of social and political science research into social network mobilizations such as the ‘Stop the War’ and ‘Black Lives Matter’ protests, as well as mass demonstrations such as the so-called ‘Umbrella Revolution’ in Hong Kong, mobilizations that are ignited and quickly grow through the use of online platforms.

²¹ See discussion in Porter (2015), ‘Soldiers Fighting Alone’.

sentiments have since subsided. Indeed by one account, mass public mobilization is now viewed with some concern by the authorities because of its uncontrollability.²² Yet Russian foreign policy continues to be understood as a means of uniting the Russian population behind the leadership, as a force for ‘negative mobilization’ through the fostering of fear, tension and hostility – as observed in 1999, 2003, 2008 and 2014.

These views of popular mobilization are two sides of the same coin. Both often focus on the legitimacy of the leadership – and the concern with which the Russian authorities view mass public demonstrations. The central issue at stake is whether the leadership has genuine popular support, or whether Putin’s very high approval ratings merely reflect passive support that could quickly change, a view illustrated by one widely circulated US report suggesting that ‘Putin’s popular support is the base of his house of cards and once that card falls, the whole house will crumble’.²³ Be that as it may, while the notion of ‘popular mobilization’ offers some insight into aspects of both democratic and authoritarian politics,²⁴ it is not what the Russian state means by ‘mobilization’.

Russian state mobilization

The Russian state has a multifaceted and specific definition of mobilization (*mobilizatsiya*). It is a ‘complex of state measures for activating the resources, strength and capabilities for the achievement of military-political aims’. It includes practical measures for the transition on to a war footing of the country’s military, economic and state institutions at all levels (general mobilization), or of some part of them (partial mobilization). Mobilization can be carried out openly or secretly, and its announcement is the responsibility of the head of state (the president) and the highest organs of state authority. The most important conditions for the successful fulfilment of mobilization include: having sufficient numbers of trained people to bring units up to strength and create new formations; the provision in peacetime of the necessary arms, equipment, ammunition and fuel; and a clearly structured system for announcing mobilization and for gathering and distributing the resources associated with it.²⁵

This definition of mobilization closely resembles one more familiar to Western observers: grand strategy – the relationship between means and ends, the prioritization of competing threats and goals, and the combination of all aspects of national power to defeat enemies and achieve the state’s objectives. It is a challenging contest against complexity, and a struggle to assert a degree of control and coherence in dealings with an unruly world.²⁶ This, too, has important implications for

²² Denis Volkov speaking at roundtable ‘Has Russia Abandoned the Path to Democracy?’, Institute of Modern Russia, 30 October 2015, <http://imrussia.org/en/news/2076-has-russia-abandoned-the-path-to-democracy>. Also see Jensen, D. (2015), ‘The Ebbing of the Patriotic Wave’, Institute of Modern Russia, 11 August 2015, <http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/nation/2378-the-ebbing-of-the-patriotic-wave>. For reflections on both Soviet and post-Soviet attempts by the leadership to mobilize the population, see Zimmerman, W. (2014), *Ruling Russia. Authoritarianism from the Revolution to Putin*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²³ Czuperski, M. et al. (2014), *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin’s War in Ukraine*, Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, p. 6.

²⁴ Dmitri Trenin has correctly noted, however, that ‘time and again’ the boiling down of a complex issue into a simple ideological dilemma of democracy against authoritarianism ‘has proven inadequate as a tool of foreign policy analysis and an unreliable guide to foreign policy making’. Trenin, D. (2014), *Russia’s Breakout From the Post-Cold War System: The Drivers of Putin’s Course*, Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 22 December 2014, <http://carnegie.ru/2014/12/22/russia-s-breakout-from-post-cold-war-system-drivers-of-putin-s-course>.

²⁵ For definitions, see the websites of the Russian Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Emergencies, <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary.htm>; www.Mchs.gov.ru/dop/terms/item/86320. Further specifics are detailed in Rogozin, D. (ed.) (2011), *Voina i Mir v terminakh i opredeleniyakh* [War and Peace in terms and definitions], Moscow: Veche, <http://voina-i-mir.ru/article627>.

²⁶ Brands, H. (2014), *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*, London: Cornell University Press, pp. 3–9; Monaghan (2014), *Defibrillating the Vertikal?*

understanding how the main features of mobilization are evolving, and for interpreting Russia's 21st-century version of mobilization.

This can be further clarified: the main pillars of state mobilization are economic and military. The mobilization of the economy is the foundation for wider, general mobilization. It is reflected in the reorganization and conversion of industry, natural resources, transport and communications to the service of the armed forces, the activities of the state and the needs of the population in times of war. This draws on Soviet-era planning, in which the military-industrial complex was at the heart of a centralized system to prepare the economy for war. Mobilization readiness was present at every level of power, and war plans were linked to industrialization. Based on the military's calculations of the nature of potential conflict, the military prepared a mobilization request, which formed the core of the investment part of the economic plan.²⁷

Economic and military mobilization is based on two stages, delineated in specific terminology. In the past, the first stage has been defined as an 'initial period' of war – or 'threatening period' – when an armed conflict could appear, and during which state agencies are primed to begin deploying forces, to mobilize the economy for war, and to negotiate with potential allies and enemies. If war becomes imminent, the leadership then announces a 'special threatening military period', in which it brings all armed forces to full military preparation and strength, and then concentrates and deploys the mobilized troops.²⁸

Today, these stages are defined respectively as *mobilizatsionnaya podgotovka* (mobilization preparation) and *mobilizatsionnaya gotovnost* (mobilization readiness), which is connected with battle readiness. The level of readiness is determined by the level of preparation. These definitions underline the concept of *peacetime* preparation – *in advance* of any conflict – of the economy, the organs of state power, the armed forces and the administrative authorities for implementing organized mobilization to defend the state from armed attack.²⁹

Economic mobilization

Important aspects of this Soviet-era system remain valid today. Indeed, Julian Cooper, a specialist on the defence industry, has suggested that the contemporary Russian system for mobilizing the economy is based on the Soviet one. Furthermore, he notes that mobilization has been an active concern of the Russian leadership for some years. In 2010, a (highly classified) concept for improving the mobilization of the Russian economy was adopted by the Russian leadership. In 2014 a new economic mobilization plan, an important document for defence management, was adopted.³⁰ These economic aspects of mobilization are the responsibility of the Military-Industrial

²⁷ Samuelson, L. (2000), *Plans for Stalin's War Machine: Tukhachevskii and Military Economic Planning, 1925-1941*, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press. The book includes a foreword by Vitalii Shlykov, who had headed the department responsible for comparative assessment of the economic and defence mobilization potential of the USSR and its opponents.

²⁸ Glantz, D. (1992), *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History*, London: Frank Cass, pp. 3, 62–63.

²⁹ Such preparations include exercising. See the Russian Ministry of Defence's definitions of mobilization here: <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary.htm>. Emphasis added.

³⁰ Cooper, J. (2015), 'Militant Russia: The Military Dimension', presentation at Centre for Russian, European and Eurasian Studies (CREES) Conference, June 2015, and subsequent correspondence with the author.

Commission, chaired by President Putin since 2014, and are often discussed by the Security Council, the main body for coordinating authority, resources and power in Russia.

In terms of economic mobilization, there has been substantial and sustained investment in the military since 2010, including in procurement, in improving conditions of service, and in reforms, training and exercising. Some estimates put annual defence spending at 4.2 per cent of GDP, but these include only the national defence chapter of the budget. A wider definition of defence, which takes into account budget chapters covering military spending, suggests a level of expenditure closer to 5.6 per cent of GDP. (Even so, Russian defence expenditure remains considerably smaller in absolute terms than that of the United States, China and Saudi Arabia.)³¹ While Russia's increased defence spending since 2010 does not necessarily equate with militarization, it none the less constitutes a sustained and substantial rearmament programme that is beginning to bear fruit, and that will continue to do so even if a 5 per cent cut in defence spending is implemented, as official statements suggest, and if the contraction in the economy continues in 2016.³²

Accompanying the rearmament programme has been a sustained effort to ensure that the economy is both resilient and self-sufficient. The Russian leadership has been emphasizing the sense of external threat to effect organizational changes, particularly in the financial and defence-industrial sectors, in an attempt to insulate Russia from hostile foreign economic measures and cope with a range of threats, potential and actual. A programme of import substitution is being implemented to ensure control of strategic sectors and to counteract Western sanctions imposed in the wake of the annexation of Crimea. Foreign suppliers are being replaced with domestic ones, or with those in countries considered reliable, including in the former Soviet space and, further afield, in China.

Thus, as Richard Connolly suggests, the Russian leadership is attempting to refit the economy to be able to withstand conflict, though the roots of such moves are deeper, pre-dating Western sanctions, and the resources being directed to these aims are sufficiently substantial to suggest that this is a long-term policy.³³ Such moves – and the perceived reasons for them – were codified in the National Security Strategy, published in late 2015, which outlines the need to sanction-proof Russia and to protect strategically important sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture and some technological sectors in arms and energy production.

At the same time, the leadership has continued to face problems in implementing these changes. Even if handled well and implemented in favourable conditions, its economic resilience policies would be unlikely to reach fruition until the early 2020s. But conditions are not favourable: investment has been in decline for three years, and the wider economy is stagnating. GDP contracted by 3.7 per cent in real terms in 2015, according to IMF data, and this trend appears set to continue in 2016.³⁴ There is thus considerable pressure on the budget. Furthermore, the presence

³¹ SIPRI (2016), 'World military spending resumes upward course, says SIPRI', 5 April, <http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/2016/milex-apr-2016>. SIPRI suggests that the United States spent \$596 billion in 2015, China \$215 billion and Saudi Arabia \$87.2 billion. SIPRI estimates that Russia spent \$66.4 billion.

³² Nikolskiy, A. and Churakova, O. (2016), 'Voennie raskhody v 2016 godu budut umensheny na 5%' [A 5% cut is to be applied to defence spending in 2016], *Vedomosti*, 19 February 2016. It is less clear, however, that this will negatively affect procurement to any significant degree, or that foregone spending will not be replaced from other sources, or that some inefficiencies cannot be removed. Correspondence with Richard Connolly, January 2016.

³³ This includes the use of economic measures in an offensive capacity also, such as Russia's counter-sanctions on the West and sanctions on Turkey.

³⁴ IMF (2016), World Economic Outlook Database, April 2016 Edition, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2016/01/weodata/index.aspx>.

of so many priorities across a wide range of industries means that implementation efforts are not satisfactorily concentrated.

Conversion of the economy into a self-reliant condition is likely therefore to be patchy, and limited to certain areas. Nevertheless, the overall point remains: the leadership is implementing a change in the structure of the Russian economy to a security-dominated model, in which attempts to reduce vulnerability trump considerations of economic efficiency,³⁵ and in which, as Putin has suggested, the defence industry also serves as an engine of broader economic development during the current downturn.³⁶

Military and security mobilization

The military aspects of Russia's mobilization include the transition of the military and civil defence forces on to a war footing.³⁷ This is largely a task concerned with complex administration – storing supplies and equipment; organizing and concentrating forces; coordinating men, equipment and transport with their missions; and deploying these assets as needed.

But it is also about the evolving conceptualization of the structure and role of the Russian armed forces. Thus the theme of mobilization sheds light on some enduring questions for the Russian leadership that go beyond the simple idea that mobilization is administration and 'a staff problem'. Indeed, mobilization has traditionally been related to how Moscow thinks about contemporary and future war. It has long been associated with the modernization of Russia's armed forces, as the leadership has sought to work out the kind of force structures necessary to minimize the country's weaknesses and maximize its advantages over opponents.

In this respect, two long-standing and closely related concerns stand out. First is the balance between the need for large armies in modern war and the difficulty of economically sustaining them. If the imperial Russian answer to this was to maintain, in effect, two armies, one based in the west of the country, the other in the east, the Soviet answer was the 'cadre mobilization' system, in which the bulk of the army's units and formations during peacetime would be maintained at reduced or skeleton strength, only to be brought up to full strength once mobilization was declared. Indeed, the main asset of the Soviet/Russian armed forces was the potential for mobilization of a massive cohort of well-trained reserves. This system was designed for fighting large-scale wars, and echoed older forms of national mobilization, the *levée en masse* and 'defence of the motherland' style of demand on the citizenry, in which millions of people could quickly be called into service.

This 'two armies' question has evolved, but it has remained a problem throughout the post-Soviet era. With the collapse of the USSR, according to one Russian observer, the leadership faced a 'mobilization crisis', in which the national-mobilization-centric armed forces were inappropriately structured to deal with emergent problems. Both the international environment and the Russian

³⁵ Connolly, R. (2016), 'Economic Aspects of Russian Mobilization', presentation at Chatham House, 27 January 2016; also Connolly, R. (2015), 'Security Above All', *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 6, November–December 2015, and subsequent correspondence with the author.

³⁶ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Soveshaniye po voprosam razvitiya Vooruzhennykh Sil' [A Meeting about the development of the Armed Forces], 9 November 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/keywords/91/events/50648>.

³⁷ Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary.htm>.

domestic situation had substantially evolved: not only was there no need to prepare for another world war, with local conflicts being the main problem, but government-ordered national mobilization faced serious public opposition. Yet the mass-mobilization structure of the armed forces meant that even dealing with limited local wars on Russia's borders required the leadership to call at least a partial mobilization – which in turn triggered rioting.³⁸

This created, according to Mikhail Barabanov, an 'extremely grave' situation that lasted for two decades. During this time, for domestic political reasons, the government could not satisfactorily or reliably effect mobilization to respond to local conflicts – and yet there was a proliferation of such conflicts. Thus the leadership faced an 'intractable problem' that hampered its ability to use Russia's armed forces: how to 'retain a mobilization centric setup of the Russian armed forces, while also finding ways of effectively using those forces in limited conflicts without actually conducting a mobilization'.³⁹

This dilemma has been at the heart of Russian military reform since the early 1990s, and has had a variety of structural ramifications. It has informed decisions on numerical strength and force structure, and has been visible in the existence of a command-and-control system that is geared towards mobilizing and deploying an armed force 10 million strong but that in practice deals with much smaller forces. The haphazard nature of reforms led to the creation of a post-Soviet version of the 'two armies' problem, in which the government attempted to maintain a professional, combat-ready force that could be deployed to conflicts at short notice in parallel with a much larger and unwieldy – even undeployable – old-style mass-mobilization force unsuited to the kinds of conflicts Russia might need to fight. Moreover, this balancing act had to be performed even as economic problems meant that Russia could hardly afford to maintain one army, let alone two.

The question of the shift towards a professionalized armed force has remained a central feature of the debate. Parts of the military have been unwilling, Barabanov suggests, to effect such a shift, since the mass-mobilization-centric armed forces were seen as indispensable for defending Russia against adversaries much larger and better equipped. Concessions to professionalization were thus slow and limited. The problems of striking the balance inherent in the 'two armies' problem meant not only that the bulk of the Russian armed forces were both obsolete and limited in usability, but also that the increase in spending across the armed forces was spread too thinly and did not translate into 'any notable increase in ... fighting ability'.⁴⁰ This debate appears to be ongoing, as Russian thinkers consider the problematic nature of professional armies, and the questions of numbers in war and the important role that reservists continue to play. One Russian observer has noted, for instance, that in terms of reservists and its mobilization system, Russia has an advantage over NATO.⁴¹

³⁸ Barabanov, M. (2014), 'Russian Military Reform up to the Georgian Conflict', in Howard, C. and Pukhov, R. (eds) (2014), *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, Minneapolis: East View Press, p. 78.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 87, 89. Barabanov suggests that this was one of the reasons why Anatoliy Serdyukov was appointed minister of defence: the Russian leadership was frustrated at spending so much money on the military for such little result and wanted to know where it was all going. Serdyukov's task was to 'drag the MoD and the entire Russian military machine into an era of effective management', p. 87.

⁴¹ Sharkovski, A. (2016), 'Byudzhet Minoborony budet sekvestirovan' [The budget of the Ministry of Defence will be sequestered], *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozreniye*, 29 January 2016, http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2016-01-29/1_sequestr.html. See also Mikryukov, V. (2015), 'Esli budet voina' [If there is war], *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozreniye*, 18 December 2015, http://nvo.ng.ru/gpolit/2015-12-18/1_war.html. The author is grateful to Johan Norberg and a Western official for exchanges on this theme.

The second concern is the ‘mobilization gap’ arising from Russia’s vast size and limited infrastructure. This both accentuates the administrative complexities of husbanding resources and emphasizes Russia’s weaknesses, because enemy forces might be able to achieve military advantage by mobilizing, concentrating and deploying their resources faster than Russia. This would give Russia’s opponents a rolling strategic advantage. It would mean that Russia’s own comparatively slow mobilization was vulnerable to disruption, and that Russia’s opponents would subsequently enjoy numerical superiority in the early battles, thus benefiting from the considerable advantages of having the initiative in the war.

Historically, the theme of mobilization has thus shaped successive conceptual debates in the Russian military: about the relative balance between field forces and fortifications in the 19th century;⁴² and then, for much of the 20th century, about the need to seize the initiative and win a short war against NATO before the West could mobilize its superior economy. So planning focused on the need to end a war by the time the enemy expected it to start, in other words *before* Western mobilization, concentration and deployment. This led to the emergence of concepts unfamiliar to Western militaries, such as the ‘meeting battle’,⁴³ and to thinking that evolved as Soviet military strategists emphasized certain aspects at particular times, such as ‘classic’ total force mobilization. It subsequently accentuated other concepts, such as a rapid, selective mobilization, and accordingly shaped force structures.⁴⁴

Drawing these together, the conceptual theme that stands out about Russian military mobilization is that it is about understanding the evolution of war and implementing measures to face it. It is predominantly about *readiness*.⁴⁵ This historical background and the emphasis on readiness are noteworthy because many of their themes underpin thinking about mobilization today. The history and evolution of mobilization from its 19th- and 20th-century origins are explicitly mentioned in the Ministry of Defence (MoD)’s definitions, which underscore the importance of ‘mobilization preparation’ taking place in advance of hostilities.⁴⁶

Mobilization preparation is also illustrated in the February 2013 article by Valeriy Gerasimov, which many in the West have interpreted as the centrepiece of the so-called ‘Gerasimov doctrine’ and a portent of ‘hybrid war’. At the start of the article, he suggests that in the 21st century the world has ‘seen a tendency towards blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared’. Yet as he indicates later in the article, this is not new: he quotes the Soviet military theoretician Georgy Isserson, who stated before the Second World War that ‘war in general is not declared, it simply begins with already developed military forces’.

⁴² Menning, B. (1992), *Bayonets Before Bullets. The Imperial Russian Army, 1861-1914*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 272.

⁴³ A ‘meeting’ battle – *vstrechniy бой* – was one fought on the move, catching the opponent before he had deployed into intended defensive positions. The author is grateful to Charles Dick for exchanges on this theme.

⁴⁴ See Vigor, P. (1983), *Soviet Blitzkrieg Theory*, New York: St Martin’s Press; Glantz, D. (1991), *Soviet Military Operation Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle*, London: Frank Cass; Donnelly, C. (1988), *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War*, London: Jane’s Informational Group.

⁴⁵ Jacob Kipp notes that it is mobilization readiness that makes it possible at the beginning of war to place the maximum possible forces at the front, offering more chances to achieve superiority over the enemy at the outset of war. Kipp, J. (2006), ‘Foreword’ in Triandafilov, V. K. (2006), *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies*, London: Routledge, p. xiv, emphasis added. Kipp also notes that Russian/Soviet thinkers made the link between mobilization and strategy – ‘mobilization of all the resources of the country and the directing of the country’s armed forces towards the achievement of the political objectives of the war – the affair of strategy’, p. xiv.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary.htm>.

This is central to the wider Russian view of international affairs today: the concern about the speed with which conflict and war erupt and evolve, and thus the need to be prepared to defend the state and its interests against a multiplicity of potential threats at a moment's notice. Gerasimov again quoted Isserson when he stated that 'mobilization and concentration is not part of the period after the onset of the state of war, as in 1914, but rather *unnoticed, proceeds long before that*'.⁴⁷ As discussed below, this corresponds not only with other statements about the international environment by Gerasimov and others since at least early 2013, but also with the exercises preparing Russia for the eventuality of a major state-to-state war.

⁴⁷ Gerasimov (2013), 'Tsennost nauki v predvidenniye'. Emphasis added.

3. Russia: Facing a 21st Century of Instability

There is much public discussion in Russia about international instability and the possibility of conflict, perhaps even leading to the outbreak of major war. This began even before the sharp deterioration in relations between Russia and the West in 2014. In 2013 observers were pointing to the contours of international instability, suggesting that the world is on the eve of major geopolitical and technological changes – and that ‘today’s world is slowly moving towards world war, the avoidance of which is impossible’.⁴⁸ Likewise, Vladimir Karyakin, a retired senior military officer who now conducts research ‘in the interests’ of the Russian Presidential Administration and Security Council, suggested that the world is entering a complex period of development that appears as a systemic crisis.

The main features of this are the European Union’s financial and economic crisis; socio-political turbulence, even revolution, that has driven change and a crisis in the state system in North Africa and the Middle East; and the evolution of warfare in the 21st century – particularly the use of indirect action, soft power and humanitarian intervention as part of ‘guided chaos’ through which the West, according to some Russian observers, has created instability in the former Soviet space. NATO’s intervention in Afghanistan and the ‘colour revolutions’ in former Soviet republics are both put forward as examples of this.⁴⁹

Members of the conservative Izborsky Club, many of whom are prominent public commentators with extensive experience in senior positions in government and the military, are prolific and pessimistic on this theme. In 2013, for instance, they suggested four scenarios of international development, three of which were painted in negative or very negative terms (‘very bloody’) and only one of which offered a more positive way out of the crisis with ‘much less blood spilt’.⁵⁰ Since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, this pessimism has only become more explicit. Western audiences might find the arguments contentious, to say the least, but the titles of texts such as *The Ukrainian Catastrophe: from American Aggression to World War?*⁵¹ and *Strike on Russia: Geopolitics and the Premonition of War*⁵² give a flavour of the nature of the Izborsky Club’s discussion – seeing a competitive, unstable world in which the United States is an aggressor and Russia is under threat. The most recent of these texts, *The Last World War: the USA Starts it and Loses it*, reflects in somewhat grandiose conceptual terms on the current ‘super-crisis’ and the ‘abyss’ into which humanity is apparently perilously close to falling.⁵³

⁴⁸ Khaustova, N. and Glazunov, O. (2013), *Kontury strategicheskoi nestabilnosti XXI veka. Prognozy do 2030 goda* [The Contours of Strategic Instability in the 21st Century: Predictions for 2030], Moscow: URSS, p. 160.

⁴⁹ Karyakin, V. (2013), *Geopolitika tretei volny: transformatsiya mira v epokhu Postmoderna* [Geopolitics of the Third Wave: Transformation of the World in the Postmodern Era], Moscow: Granitsa.

⁵⁰ Delyagin, Glaziev and Fursov (2013), *Strategiya “Bolshovo ryvka”*, pp. 6–7.

⁵¹ Glaziev, S. (2015), *Ukrainskaya katastrofa: ot Amerikanskoi aggressii k mirovoi voine?* [The Ukrainian Catastrophe: from American Aggression to World War?], Moscow: Knizhni Mir. Glaziev, one of the founding members of the Izborsky Club, is an adviser to Vladimir Putin.

⁵² Korovin, V. (2015), *Udar po Rossii: Geopolitika i predchuvstvie voiny* [Strike on Russia: Geopolitics and the Premonition of War], St. Petersburg: Piter.

⁵³ Glaziev, S. (2016), *Poslednyaya mirovaya voina: SShA nachinayut i proigrivayut* [The Last World War: the USA Starts it and Loses it], Moscow: Knizhni Mir.

If other Russian observers from across the analytical spectrum are less dramatic in their prognoses, the overall tenor of the debate remains pessimistic: Sergei Karaganov has suggested that ‘we are in a pre-world war situation’. While the existence of nuclear weapons would render a major war unlikely, he thought, there ‘could be a military or quasi military situation’.⁵⁴ Pavel Felgenhauer has suggested that a world war is ‘practically unavoidable’, probably in the middle of the next decade.⁵⁵

Still others point to the difficulties facing Russian defence planners even today. Ruslan Pukhov, a prominent Moscow-based observer of the Russian defence industry, suggested that four years ago, concerns about China, potential Islamist insurgency in the south, a resumption of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, or even another Russo-Georgian war dominated Russian concerns. Since 2014, however, this list of challenges has expanded to include potential conflict in the Arctic and an open conflict on Russia’s borders (in Ukraine) that has led to hostile relations with NATO. Threats are now all round Russia’s borders, he noted, and the Russian chief of the General Staff ‘should be having nightmares’ since it is difficult to prepare defences for such circumstances.⁵⁶

To be sure, while most of the above commentators are prominent public intellectuals, or consultants and advisers to senior officials, not all of them have real policy influence. Nor is there unanimity across the spectrum of analysts and observers on questions such as whether war is ‘inevitable’. Nevertheless, this overview suggests that such views and concerns are widely held.

Moreover, many of these views are clearly shared by the Russian leadership, featuring prominently in speeches and having been codified in a series of programmes, doctrines, concepts and strategies.⁵⁷ There are visible longer-term concerns about increasing international competition and its negative consequences for stability and security (as noted, for instance, in the National Security Strategy published in 2009). The Russian leadership sees international affairs as entering a transitional period, in a long-term evolution that was accelerated by the global financial crisis. This is reflected in the perceived decline of Western, and particularly Anglo-Saxon, powers, and in the rise of other international power centres. In an article in January 2012, Vladimir Putin stated that the world faces ‘serious systemic crisis’ and is entering a ‘zone of turbulence which will be long and painful’.⁵⁸ The Foreign Policy Concept, published in February 2013, echoed this. It noted that this transition will be accompanied by ‘economic and political turbulence at global and regional levels’, and that there are numerous sources of instability resulting from the West’s efforts to preserve its influence and from the emergence of competition over resources and rivalry over values.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Mackinnon, M. (2014), ‘Sergei Karaganov: The Man Behind Putin’s Pugnacity’, *Globe and Mail*, 30 March 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/sergey-karaganov-the-man-behind-putins-pugnacity/article17734125/>.

⁵⁵ Bolotov, Y. (2015), ‘Voenni expert Pavel Felgengauer – o gotovnosti Rossiiskoi armii i ugroze Tretei mirovoi voiny’ [Military expert Pavel Felgenhauer – on the Readiness of the Russian army and the threat of World War III], *The Village*, 20 February 2015, <http://www.the-village.ru/village/city/city-news/176731-army>.

⁵⁶ Bodner, M. (2015), ‘Analyst: Russian Industry Faces Challenge Unique to ‘Putin’s Russia’’, *Defense News*, 9 August 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/leaders/interviews/2015/08/09/interview-ruslan-pukhov-cast-russia-defense-industry-analyst/31105299/>.

⁵⁷ This evolving series of documents, which has been routinely updated over the past decade, frames and gives official sanction to the series of Moscow’s assumptions, concerns and priorities. Monaghan (2014), *Defibrillating the Vertikal?*

⁵⁸ Putin, V. (2012), ‘Rossiya sosredotochivaetsa – vyzovy, na kotorie my dolzhni otvetit’ [Russia is focusing – challenges to which we must respond], *Izvestiya*, 16 January 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/511884>.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2013), ‘Konseptsiya vneshnoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii’ [The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation], 12 February 2013, http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186.

The possibility of war?

Russia has two sets of concerns related to this world view of disruptive transition and competition between powers. The first is the possible eruption of conflict and war. If the Foreign Policy Concept and the Military Doctrine, published in December 2014, suggest that the likelihood of a major war being directly unleashed on Russia has diminished, they also point to the evolving balance of military forces and the erosion of global security. The Military Doctrine notes that ‘in a number of areas the military risks faced by Russia are increasing’, and that one of the main threats is a dramatic deterioration in military-political conditions and the consequent creation of conditions likely to lead to the use of armed force. The doctrine also notes the continuation of unresolved conflicts, including on Russia’s borders, and the tendency for antagonists to resolve them through military action.⁶⁰

In his February 2013 article, Gerasimov also reflected on the United States’ Prompt Global Strike programme and its concept of ‘global missile defence’, both of which ‘foresee the defeat of enemy objects and forces in a matter of hours from almost any point on the globe, while at the same time ensuring the prevention of unacceptable harm from an enemy counterstrike’. Similarly, he pointed to US deployment of highly mobile, mixed-type groups of forces.

At the same time, he was pessimistic about the longer term: he suggested that Russia may be drawn into military conflicts as powers vie for resources, many of which are in Russia or its immediate neighbourhood. Thus, by 2030 ‘the level of existing and potential threats will significantly increase’ as ‘powers struggle for fuel, energy and labour resources, as well as new markets in which to sell their goods’. Given such conditions, some ‘powers will actively use their military potential’, he thought.⁶¹

Speaking at the Valdai international discussion club in late 2014, Vladimir Putin asserted that the lessons of history suggest that ‘changes in the world order, and what we’re seeing today are events on this scale, have usually been accompanied if not by global war and conflict, then by chains of intensive low-level conflicts’, and ‘today we see a sharp increase in the likelihood of a whole set of violent conflicts with either the direct or indirect participation by the world’s major powers’. Risks, he suggested, included not just traditional multinational conflicts, but also internal instability in states, especially those located at the intersections of geopolitical interests or on the border of cultural, historical and economic civilizational continents.⁶² The following year, Putin emphasized that ‘new hotspots’ are appearing across the world, and that there is a ‘deficit of security’ in Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, the Asia-Pacific region and in Africa, combined with an increasing intensity of conflict and competition – military, economic, political and informational – throughout

⁶⁰ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), *Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], No. Pr. 2976, 25 December 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/47334>, <http://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>.

⁶¹ Cited in *Russia Today News* (2013), ‘Russia may be drawn into resources wars in future – army chief’, 14 February 2013, <https://www.rt.com/politics/military-conflict-gerasimov-threat-196/>.

⁶² Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), ‘Zasedaniye Mezhdunarodnovo Diskussionnovo kluba “Valdai”’ [Meeting of the International Discussion Club ‘Valdai’], 24 October 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>.

the world. ‘The potential for conflict in the world is growing, old contradictions are growing ever more acute and new ones are being provoked,’ he suggested.⁶³

In Moscow’s view this is highlighted by the gradual undermining of strategic stability, particularly as a result of the United States’ ballistic missile defence programme and Washington’s withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002. Putin stated in October 2014 that ‘there is no guarantee that the current system of global and regional security is able to protect us from upheavals. This system has become seriously weakened, fragmented and deformed’.⁶⁴ Indeed, far from there being a balance of power, the Russian leadership sees an arms race already well under way, in which the major powers are upgrading and modernizing their armed forces, including developing advanced precision weapons that equal weapons of mass destruction in their strategic impact. ‘Most of the world’s leading countries are actively upgrading their military arsenals and investing huge sums in developing advanced weapons systems,’ Putin stated in December 2013, which leads to a situation in which there are ‘attempts to violate and disturb the strategic balance’.⁶⁵ Indeed, Putin had already pointed to such concerns in 2007 at his speech at the Munich Security Conference, and again in early 2008 when he noted that ‘it is clear that the world has entered a new spiral in the arms race. The most developed countries are making use of their technical advantages and spending billions of dollars on developing next generation defensive and offensive weapons. Their defence investment is dozens of times higher than ours’.⁶⁶

The threat of regime change

The second set of concerns flowing from Moscow’s understanding of this transition and competition relates to perceived modern Western ways of war – that is, war by humanitarian intervention, power projection using expeditionary forces, and war by regime change or, as it is also known in Russia, war by ‘colour revolution’. This is seen as posing a threat to regional stability broadly (as illustrated by the wars in Libya and Syria); to the post-Soviet space more specifically (as illustrated by events in Ukraine); and directly to Russia itself. This series of concerns appears to be the priority for the short term.

Speaking in November 2014, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that ‘Western leaders are publicly declaring that sanctions should destroy the economy and trigger popular protests ... the West unequivocally demonstrates that it does not merely seek to change Russian policy ... but to change the regime’. This represents a form of warfare, in the Russian interpretation, that ‘strives not to defeat the enemy militarily so much as to change regimes in states that pursue a policy Washington does not like’. Such measures include financial and economic pressure, information

⁶³ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), ‘Soveshaniye poslov i postoyannikh predstavitelei Rossii’ [Meeting of ambassadors and permanent representatives of Russia], 1 July 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131>.

⁶⁴ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), ‘Zasedaniye Mezhdunarodnovo Diskussionnovo kluba “Valdai”’ [Meeting of the International Discussion Club ‘Valdai’], 24 October 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>.

⁶⁵ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2013), ‘Rasshirenoe zasedaniye kollegi Minoboroni’ [Expanded Meeting of the Defence Ministry Staff], 10 December 2013, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19816>.

⁶⁶ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2008), ‘Speech at Expanded Meeting of the State Council on Russia’s Development through to 2020’, 8 February 2008, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24825>.

attacks, the use of other actors on the perimeter of corresponding states as proxies, and the application of pressure through externally financed non-governmental organizations.⁶⁷

Such concerns have their roots in the colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively. Senior figures in the Russian leadership, including Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the Security Council, have often stated their views about colour revolutions being used to facilitate regime change, not least during the protests in Russia in December 2011, which, they suggested, were supported by the United States. In December 2012, Patrushev stated that ‘events are in motion in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Ukraine, we are dealing with it every day. Are they a danger for us? Yes’.⁶⁸ He has regularly returned to variations on this theme, and in July 2015 asserted that the aim of Western sanctions on Russia was to change the regime.⁶⁹

Putin has also often spoken on this theme, pointing to the need to learn lessons from colour revolutions, and asserting that every effort must be made to prevent one from happening in Russia. In the spring of 2015, he stated that he saw ‘attempts to use so-called colour revolution technology, ranging from organizing unlawful protests to open propaganda of hatred and enmity in social networks’. The aim, he thought, was ‘obvious’ – to provoke civil strife and ‘strike a blow at [Russia’s] sovereignty’.⁷⁰

Importantly, the Russian leadership appears to link these concerns to questions of terrorism and separatism. In late 2014, addressing a meeting of the Security Council, Putin stated that ‘extremism is often used as a geopolitical instrument to re-arrange spheres of influence’. Colour revolutions have had tragic consequences, he continued, creating turmoil in the countries where they have happened. Russia must treat these experiences as ‘warnings and develop a united front against extremism, educate people and ensure conditions for stronger peace and accord in society’.⁷¹

A month later, he stated that the Russian leadership remembered ‘well who and how, almost openly supported separatism ... and even outright terrorism in Russia ... [and] referred to murderers as rebels and organized high level receptions for them’. He continued: ‘Support for separatism from across the pond, including informational, political and financial support, and by the special services, was absolutely obvious and left no doubt that they would gladly let Russia follow the Yugoslavian scenarios of disintegration and dismemberment.’⁷² He thus charged the Ministry of the Interior (MVD) with drafting a strategy for countering extremism in Russia for the period to 2025,

⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2014), ‘Remarks at the XXII Assembly of the Council of Foreign and Defence Policy’, 2 November 2014, http://archive.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/o/24454A08D48F695EC3257D9A004BA32E.

⁶⁸ *Sputnik News* (2012), ‘Putin’s Ally Warns of Colour Revolutions’, 9 December 2012, <http://sputniknews.com/politics/20121209/178026189.html>.

⁶⁹ *Ekho Moskvy* (2015), ‘Sekretar SovBeza Nikolai Patrushev zayavil shto tsel zapadnikh sanktsii – eto smena rukovodstva Rossii’ [Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev said that the goal of Western sanctions is leadership change in Russia], 3 July 2015, <http://echo.msk.ru/news/1578484-echo.html>.

⁷⁰ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), ‘Rasshirenoe zasedanie kollegi MVD’ [An Extended Meeting of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Staff], 4 March 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47776>.

⁷¹ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), ‘Zasedaniye Soveta Bezopasnosti’ [Meeting of the Security Council], 20 November 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47045>.

⁷² Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), ‘Poslaniye Prezidenta Federalnomu Sobraniyu’ [Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly], 4 December 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173>. Putin returned to this theme in an interview with the German newspaper *Bild* in January 2016. Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2016), ‘Intervyu Nemetskomu izdaniyu Bild. Chast 1’ [Interview with the German Newspaper *Bild*: Part 1], 11 January 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51154>.

and subsequently charged the Security Council with updating the National Security Strategy to take these concerns into account.⁷³

The theme of colour revolution and its purported risks to regional stability, as well as to Russia directly, has also been a central part of the debate in the Russian military.⁷⁴ At a forum in 2015, Shoigu stated, ‘Some say the Army should stand on the sidelines and not be included in the political process, and some say the opposite.’ The MoD would give the order to carry out deep scientific research into counteracting colour revolutions, he stated.⁷⁵ Indeed, it appears that already in late 2014, the MoD had commissioned research by the Academy of the General Staff into countering colour revolutions and strengthening the political system in Russia. The research included work by military specialists with experience in anti-terrorist operations in the North Caucasus, and also by civilian specialists from major universities. The MoD has also proposed mandatory university courses to teach students how to fight colour revolutions.⁷⁶ The proposal was a response to the call by a Moscow city parliamentarian who called for an ‘anti-revolutionary’ course to be part of the military training for Russian undergraduates. The MoD suggested that this should be taken further and that students should be trained to oppose political revolts, studying the technologies of colour revolution and how to counteract them.

Russia surrounded by an ‘arc of crisis’

To sum up, these concerns reflect three main points in Moscow’s thinking. The first is that the war in Ukraine was not so much the beginning of a new era, but rather the result of a series of trends that have been evolving for years. The second is the primary destabilizing role of the United States (and its allies) in international affairs, even as other powers compete and other sources of instability, such as Islamist radical terrorism, emerge. Noteworthy in this are the references by the leadership to the mobilization of others. Not only has Putin stated this, but it is also suggested in the Military Doctrine, which notes the ‘intensification of the activities of the armed forces of states or groups of states involving partial or full mobilization and shifting the governance and military command bodies of these states to functioning as in wartime conditions’. Other countries’ mobilization has been noted by observers in specialist media, too.⁷⁷

Third, Ukraine is only one element of a wider ‘arc of crisis’ of conflict and colour revolution around Russia, with the potential for risks and threats not only to be imported into Russia itself but to evolve and merge. Patrushev has suggested, for instance, that the United States is attempting to

⁷³ *Ekho Moskvy* (2015), ‘Sekretar SovBeza Nikolai Patrushev zayavil shto tsel zapadnikh sanktsii – eto smena rukovodstva Rossii’ [Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev said that the goal of Western sanctions is leadership change in Russia], 3 July 2015, <http://echo.msk.ru/news/1578484-echo.html>; Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), ‘Zasedaniye Soveta Bezopasnosti’ [Meeting of the Security Council], 3 July 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49862>.

⁷⁴ See remarks by Russian defence leadership at the 4th Moscow Conference on International Security, 16–17 April 2015, <http://mil.ru/pubart.htm?id=12016244%40emsArticle>.

⁷⁵ Shoigu was speaking at the Army-2015 Forum. Cited in Safronov, I. and Nagornikh, I. (2015), ‘Minoboroni podklyuchaetsa k borbe s “tsvetnimi revolyutsiyami”’ [Ministry of Defence is implicated in the fight against ‘Colour Revolutions’], *Kommersant*, 24 June 2015, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2753508>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; Dolgov, A. (2015), ‘Russian officials propose mandatory university course teaching students to fight colour revolutions’, *Moscow Times*, 2 July 2015, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-officials-propose-mandatory-university-course-teaching-students-to-fight-color-revolutions/524901.html>.

⁷⁷ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), *Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], No. Pr.2976, 25 December 2014. See also Gracheva, T. (2015), ‘Deistviya, napravleniye na unichtozhenie Rossii, SShA vedut davno i planomerno’ [Actions aimed at the destruction of Russia – the USA has been carrying them out for a long time and systematically], *Voenna-Promyshlenniy Kurier*, 16 September 2015, www.vpk-new.ru/articles/27018.

draw Russia into an interstate military conflict in Ukraine in order to weaken Russia, achieve regime change and ultimately break up Russia.⁷⁸ Thus Moscow is preparing to face a 21st century of instability, one that already poses serious strategic challenges and is likely to become more problematic. This is evidenced by officials and commentators discussing threats ranging from the outbreak of a third world war to the imposition of regime change on Russia.

Consequently, senior leadership figures regularly speak of the need to protect Russian territorial integrity and Russian sovereignty, to insulate Russia against external threats, to consolidate state institutions and civil society, and to modernize the military to ensure that Russia remains a leading country.⁷⁹ This is because the challenges posed by instability, including even the threat of war, are understood to be a test of society for which Russia is not (yet) ready: Russia faces numerous problems, including a stagnating economy, an often dysfunctional chain of authority, and a military and security apparatus still showing the effects of many years of neglect after the end of the Soviet Union. This emphasizes both the strategically defensive nature of Russian mobilization, and the point that the leadership is adjusting policies and implementing emergency measures to achieve this consolidation and modernization.

⁷⁸ Cited in Egorov, I. (2015), 'Kto upravlyayet khaosom' [Who is controlling the chaos], *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 10 February 2015, <http://rg.ru/2015/02/11/patrushev.html>. While such a view may surprise Western observers, it is worth remembering that some in the West have advocated providing lethal weapons to the Ukrainian government to raise the costs to Russia and thus oblige Russia explicitly to show its hand in Ukraine. Patrushev's view may reflect Moscow's interpretation of such a debate.

⁷⁹ Gerasimov (2013), 'Tsennost nauki v predvidenniye'; Egorov, I. (2014), 'Nikolai Patrushev: 'Otrezvlennie' ukrainsev budet zhostkim i boleznennym' [Nikolai Patrushev: the 'sobering up' of Ukrainians is going to be rough and painful], *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 15 October 2014, www.rg.ru/2014/10/15/patrushev.html.

4. Moving Russia on to a War Footing?

In practical terms security and military mobilization refers to training sufficient numbers of people, preparing equipment/supplies and strengthening the command-and-control system. All of these activities have been visible in Russian policy, and it is to this aspect of mobilization that the paper now turns, looking first at the investment in the armed forces and then reflecting on the nature of the numerous exercises being conducted. In both cases, the underlying themes are modernization, preparation and readiness – whether in terms of the equipment and nature of the forces, or their combat readiness.

Investing in the Russian armed forces

For much of the post-Soviet era, the Russian armed forces have suffered either from neglect and underinvestment, or from the dilution of resources as a result of corruption, inefficiency and (as noted in Chapter 2) unfocused spending that spread money too thinly to have an impact. The result was an armed force that was able to go to war with Georgia in 2008 and win, but that in the process had many flaws exposed. In response, the Russian leadership has implemented an extensive investment and arms procurement programme that has been under way, as Putin has stated on numerous occasions, since 2010, and the thrust of which is often re-emphasized. The scale of the investment – R20 trillion (some \$640 billion when it was signed off in 2010) for the period until 2020 – and the targets set indicate the level of ambition.

The targets were reiterated in the May Decrees that Putin signed into force when he returned to the presidency in 2012. Two of the decrees addressed military matters. One focused on improvements to conditions of military service, raising the prestige of service in the armed forces, and creating a national reserve ‘in line with the concept of creating a new system of training and accumulating mobilization resources for the armed forces’.⁸⁰

Undoubtedly, the substantial investment in service conditions and personnel is having a positive impact. But the question of creating a national reserve returns us to the ‘two armies’ issue noted above, and reveals ongoing problems. In the military reforms that began after the Russo-Georgian war, the military leadership has sought to phase out the draft and abandon the old national-mobilization model – partly because of demographic problems, and partly because of domestic protest against mobilization, particularly when it has involved deploying poorly prepared conscripts to combat zones. The decree thus stated the intention to recruit 500,000 professionals on contract by the end of the decade. The Russian leadership has attempted to implement various measures both to build a reserve force and to work more closely with the civilian sector. In late 2015 Shoigu

⁸⁰ Governor of the Sverdlovsk Region (2012), ‘O dalneishem sovershenstvovanii voennoi sluzhby v Rossiiskoi Federatsii’ [On Further Improvement of the Military Service in The Russian Federation], Decree No. 604, 7 May 2012, <http://gubernator96.ru/article/show/id/108>.

said that the number of contract servicemen had increased in that year by 10 per cent to 352,000, and would grow to 384,000 in 2016.⁸¹

However, the post-2008 attempt to shift to a professional armed force faced repeated problems and internal opposition, contributing to policy U-turns. The difficulty of finding sufficient willing recruits led to a shift back to a mixed system of conscripted privates and professional non-commissioned officers serving under contract, though this too ran into problems. Recruitment targets were missed every year, partly because of the strict recruitment criteria and partly because of candidates' poor education and physical fitness.⁸²

The reserve system continues to pose problems. Despite the restructuring of the armed forces, Barabanov suggests that the 'mechanisms of maintaining and mobilizing the military reserve still look very vague and haphazard'. It remains unclear how the new brigades are to replenish combat losses when involved in limited conflicts.⁸³

Moreover, if one of the reasons for introducing a constant-readiness, professional force was to counter the problem of opposition to deployments among conscripts, desertion remains a problem even among contracted professionals. In July 2015, for instance, reports suggested that tens of contract soldiers had deserted on the basis of not wanting to serve in Ukraine,⁸⁴ and in September that year there were reports of contract soldiers refusing to go Syria and resigning.⁸⁵

Perhaps most importantly, it is far from clear that there is unanimity between Russia's leadership and the military about the targets for reserves, and there appears to be some contradiction and tension between their respective plans for reservists and resources. The leadership has continued experimenting with expensive reserve mobilization formats, even as resources have been tightening.⁸⁶ But as one experienced Russian observer has suggested, the generals 'continue to sabotage every order from the top that they dislike'. According to Alexander Goltz, the military authorities undermined the plan to encourage conscripts voluntarily to join the reserves on completion of their year's mandatory draft service because they continue to see the whole Russian adult male population as reservists. They also resisted Shoigu's plans to place 80,000–100,000 people in the reserves every year through a programme to offer a form of military service to army-age university students.⁸⁷

The second May Decree addressing military matters reiterated plans for modernizing the military-industrial complex and the armed forces, and replacing obsolete and decrepit Soviet-era weapons

⁸¹ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Rasshirenoe zasedaniye kollegi Ministerstva oborony' [Expanded meeting of Defence Ministry staff], 11 December 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50913>.

⁸² Barabanov, M. (2014), 'Changing the Force and Moving Forward After Georgia', in Howard and Pukhov (2014), *Brothers Armed*, pp. 103–104.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁸⁴ Koshik, A., Dergachev, V. and Maetnaya, E. (2015), 'Ya ne khotel uchastvovat v boevikh deistviyakh na territorii Ukrainy' [I did not want to participate in military action on Ukrainian territory], *Gazeta.ru*, 11 July 2015, http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/07/10_a_7633125.shtml.

⁸⁵ Dergachev, V. and Maetnaya, E. (2015), 'Dumali, shto v Donbass, a okazalos – v Siriyu' [We thought we were going to Donbass and it turned out to be Syria], 18 September 2015, http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/09/16_a_7760297.shtml. This was denied by the Russian Ministry of Defence, though other stories suggest that 'refuseniks' have been threatened with prosecution.

⁸⁶ Mukhin, V. (2015), 'Rezervistam dadut komandu v sentyabre' [Reservists to be mobilized in September], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 20 July 2015, http://www.ng.ru/armies/2015-07-20/1_reserv.html.

⁸⁷ Goltz, A. (2015), 'Army Brass Sabotaging Putin's Plans', *Moscow Times*, 27 July 2015. Goltz suggests that the contradiction is between Shoigu's need for statistics to build towards the target number of reservists and the military's need for personnel.

and equipment.⁸⁸ Its aim, as Putin stated, is to make up for the underfunding of the armed forces in the 1990s in one leap.⁸⁹ The intention is to increase the share of modern arms and technology to 70 per cent of the total by 2020, with further development to 2025. The priority remains the strategic nuclear forces, with the nuclear arsenal scheduled to receive 400 intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, eight nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, and modernized Tu-160 and Tu-195MS long-range bombers.

The procurement 'shopping list' is extensive. It covers equipment for space, air, land and sea, including 100 military satellites, 700 modern fighter aircraft, 1,000 helicopters, 56 S-400 air defence battalions, 2,300 tanks, 2,000 self-propelled and tracked guns, 20 attack submarines, and 50 combat surface ships. Russia's procurement plans also envisage the acquisition of much else besides, including modern transport aviation, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), electronic warfare equipment, robotic strike systems, intelligence-and-control systems, and individual soldier-defence systems.⁹⁰

These plans are undoubtedly ambitious. As one observer has noted, they are more 'wish list' than 'shopping list', and 'assume no delays, technical or design problems or bottlenecks'. Moreover, what is stated as 'being purchased' or 'to be delivered' does not necessarily correspond with the equipment actually acquired.⁹¹ Various problems are limiting resources, both financial and in terms of necessary equipment. These include inadequate capacity and lack of modernization in the defence industry itself,⁹² and also more broadly the effects of economic stagnation, corruption and Ukraine-related sanctions. The Russian leadership acknowledges that production and organizational problems in the defence industry continue to delay fulfilment of procurement orders,⁹³ and that these problems are contributing to incomplete repair and upgrading of equipment.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the combination of economic stagnation and sanctions means that defence expenditure may be cut by 5 per cent in 2016; programmes are already being delayed into the 2020s. Other problems with equipment and conditions remain evident, as illustrated by the numerous crashes suffered by Russian aviation and the collapse of the barracks at a paratrooper training camp that killed 23 servicemen in 2015.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, Shoigu and Gerasimov have both emphasized the importance of modernizing the military, given the challenges that Russia faces. Gerasimov has even suggested that possession of state-of-the-art weaponry is a 'vital condition for the country's existence'. And despite a sluggish

⁸⁸ This was a reiteration of plans already set out in 2010.

⁸⁹ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Soveshaniye po voprosam razvitiya Vooruzhonnikh sil' [Meeting on the development of the Armed Forces], 10 November 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50656>.

⁹⁰ Governor of the Sverdlovsk Region (2012), 'O realizatsii planov (programm) stroitelstva i razvitiya Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii, drugikh voisk, voinskikh formirovaniy i organov i modernizatsii oboronno-promyshlennogo kompleksa' [On the fulfilment of plans for the construction and development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other forces, military formations and agencies and the modernization of the military-industrial complex], Decree No. 603, 7 May 2012, <http://gubernator96.ru/article/show/id/108>.

⁹¹ Gilbert, S. (rapporteur) (2015), *Russian Military Modernization*, Draft General Report of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Science and Technology Committee, 24 March 2015, pp. 2–3, <http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?SHORTCUT=3706#STC>.

⁹² It should be remembered that capacity is stretched by the Russian defence industry's increasing commitments to supply weapons to external customers. The author is grateful to Richard Connolly for this point.

⁹³ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Soveshaniye po voprosam razvitiya Vooruzhennykh Sil' [A Meeting on the Development of the Armed Forces], 11 November 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/keywords/91/events/50668>.

⁹⁴ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Rasshirenoe zasedaniye kollegi Ministerstva oborony' [Expanded meeting of Defence Ministry Staff], 19 December 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50913>.

⁹⁵ Bodner, M. (2015), 'Analyst: Russian Industry Faces Challenge Unique to 'Putin's Russia'', *Defense News*, 9 August 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/leaders/interviews/2015/08/09/interview-russian-pukhov-cast-russia-defense-industry-analyst/31105299/>. In a short period in the summer of 2015, nine military aircraft crashed.

start, procurement has begun to pick up. The percentage of modern weapons used by Russia's military has been rising roughly in line with stated plans (including through measures such as retiring obsolete equipment), with Shoigu suggesting that the figure is likely to reach 50 per cent of the total by the end of 2016.

Testing the system

Concurrent with this investment and reform programme, the Russian armed forces have taken part in thousands of tactical, operational and strategic exercises. These have received some attention in the West,⁹⁶ often in terms of their relevance to the war in Ukraine. They have often been assumed to be (and portrayed as) a means of maintaining pressure on and distracting Ukrainian forces and NATO. This Western interpretation has some merit, and was particularly relevant at times in 2014 and 2015.

But most of the exercises conducted by the Russian armed forces over the past five years are better understood not as 'snap' exercises (a term that emphasizes a high degree of control and readiness), but rather as 'no-notice' exercises, intended to test systematically the Russian military's combat readiness. The exercises have therefore often been about how the Russian system works (or does not work), and have served as a means for the leadership to discover weaknesses within it.

Over the past five years, these exercises have become significantly larger and more sophisticated. Indeed, some of Russia's strategic exercises have deployed more troops than the entire British army and have involved all the branches and services of the armed forces.⁹⁷ Johan Norberg's assessment, then, that by 2015 'Russia had been preparing its armed forces for a regional confrontation with possible escalation into using nuclear weapons for at least four years' is accurate. As a result of the exercises, the Russian armed forces, he continued, were 'most likely capable of launching large-scale conventional high-intensity offensive joint inter-service operations, or ... to put it simply, to *conduct big war-fighting operations with big formations*'.⁹⁸

Nor is it only the military that has undergone preparatory exercises. The Ministry of the Interior (MVD) has also carried out large-scale exercises, such as Zaslou-2015, which took place shortly after the major military exercises in March 2015. Zaslou-2015 brought together police, MVD troops and other paramilitary formations to test their readiness to deal with a deterioration of the situation in the Russian regions. The eight-day exercises, held across six Russian regions, included joint operations to seal the borders and ensure law and order, territorial defence, counterterrorism and protection of strategic facilities. As MVD spokesman Vasiliy Panchenkov stated, a main focus was dealing with civil disobedience and an attempted colour revolution – indeed, the exercises were

⁹⁶ One of the most thoughtful and detailed examinations is Norberg, J. (2015), *Training to Fight – Russia's Major Military Exercises 2011-2014*, Stockholm: FOI.

⁹⁷ Official figures suggest that 155,000 troops took part in the strategic exercise Vostok-2014, with 8,000 pieces of equipment, 85 ships and 650 aircraft.

⁹⁸ Norberg (2015), *Training to Fight*, pp. 61–62. Emphasis added.

'based on events that took place in the recent past in a neighbouring country and featured all the attributes of those events'.⁹⁹

The strategic exercises have mostly been about fast deployment across long distances – in many ways, a modern attempt to address the 'mobilization gap'. Exercises have regularly been held in which forces must deploy at speed over thousands of kilometres – the Vostok-2014 exercise, for instance, was held across distances of over 12,000 kilometres. This is clearly having a positive impact: as Philip Breedlove, NATO's SACEUR, stated in 2014, the Russian armed forces were able to demonstrate 'unexpected flexibility in moving their forces significant distances, achieving readiness very rapidly and manoeuvring to preserve a variety of options. This degree of agility and speed is new and it is something we have to adapt to'.¹⁰⁰

The exercises also tested command and control and coherence beyond the military. They were thus about the whole state's capacity to wage war.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Shoigu stated that strategic exercises included checking the performance of mobilization systems across several regions of Russia. During Zapad-2013, for instance, no-notice exercises tested the mobilization preparedness of the ministries of transport and energy, and the administration of Nizhegorodsky region.¹⁰² Similarly, the Vostok-2014 exercises involved 138 local governments, 75 subordinate authorities and 10 territorial authorities, and were coordinated with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Health.¹⁰³

Coordinated command and control is a central aspect of such exercises. The establishment of the National Defence Control Centre (NDCC) is perhaps the most important feature of this. Opened in December 2014, it is the single main point of coordination for information and control. The NDCC monitors and coordinates major exercises and other military activities, including arms procurement and communications. In the case of war, it assumes control of the whole country, providing reports to the military command and issuing orders to all ministries, agencies, state companies and other organizations.¹⁰⁴ The commander of the NDCC, Lt Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev, has suggested that the closest analogy in terms of its function is the Commander-in-Chief Headquarters during the Second World War, which 'centralized all controls of the military machine and the economy of the nation in the interests of the war'.¹⁰⁵

Other organizations, such as the Main Directorate for Special Projects and Programmes, have also played an important role in coordinating military and civilian agencies during exercises. Furthermore, organizations have been established across the country, including the Joint Strategic Command of the Northern Fleet and regional situation centres.¹⁰⁶ A secure videoconferencing

⁹⁹ Panchenkov cited in Parfitt, T. (2015), 'Russian Troops Practise Quelling Ukrainian-style Revolution', *Telegraph*, 9 April 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11525385/Russian-troops-practise-quelling-Ukrainian-style-revolution.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Breedlove, P. (2014), 'The Meaning of Russia's Military Campaign Against Ukraine', *Wall Street Journal*, 16 July 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/phil-breedlove-the-meaning-of-russias-military-campaign-against-ukraine-1405552018>.

¹⁰¹ Norberg (2015), *Training to Fight*, p. 62.

¹⁰² "Zapad-2013" – pervye vyvody [Zapad-2013 – preliminary conclusions], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 27 September 2013, <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/component/k2/item/11764-%20zapad-2013-pervye-vyvody>.

¹⁰³ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), 'Soveshaniye po voprosu razvitiya Voruzhennykh Sil' [Meeting on the development of the armed forces], 24 November 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47061>.

¹⁰⁴ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Vstrecha s Ministrom oborony Sergeem Shoigu i nachalnikom Genshtaba Valeriyem Gerasimovym' [Meeting with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov], 24 March 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/48988>; also see Gavrilov, Y. (2014), 'Prikaz pristupit iz tsentra' [The order will come from the centre], *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 27 October 2014, <http://www.rg.ru/2014/10/27/kartapolov.html>.

¹⁰⁵ RT (2014), 'Russia launches 'wartime government' HQ in major military upgrade', 1 December 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/210307-russia-national-defence-center/>.

¹⁰⁶ For the latter, see <http://www.сайтцентр.рф>.

network has been created, and hardware and software packages for both national and regional centres are under preparation in order to 'raise management quality and durability and ensure a more prompt response to changes in the military and political situation'.¹⁰⁷

This command-and-control system, though reflecting important improvements to existing structures, still has problems. These include the quality of data submitted to the NDCC, and thus the quality of planning, as well as the inability of video monitoring to improve practical implementation of plans.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, the exercises have revealed ongoing problems in operational efficiency and preparedness (as indeed they were intended to). These appear to be predominantly in coordinating communications, transport and logistics.¹⁰⁹ There are also weaknesses in coordination between the federal and regional services and military and civilian sectors. Reporting on the Vostok-2014 exercises, Shoigu requested that Putin instruct governors and mayors to attend a two-week training course at the Academy of the General Staff for mobilization preparedness and instruction on governing their regions during the period of mobilization. Media reported that unnamed sources in the General Staff had suggested that this was because officials, particularly the governor of Sakhalin, Alexander Khoroshavin, had been unready for the exercises and performed poorly. 'Regional authorities often fail to understand the importance of military exercises and prefer to drag their feet in executing orders because they simply don't know what they should do and how they should do it,' a General Staff source suggested.¹¹⁰

Putin himself noted this problem of coordination and effectiveness, stating that:

... as things stand, the MoD or its local offices are responsible for organizing mobilization. This should be the responsibility of regional heads, but they seem to see it as being of secondary importance ... territorial defence is the responsibility today of various agencies and isn't centralized at all. We need to raise the regional heads' responsibility in this area too ... [but] we often encounter an inadequate reaction to our efforts to defend our national interests. We must ... respond professionally to the problems and oversights that come to light in our practical work and during the exercises.¹¹¹

Russia's mobilization preparations are incomplete, therefore. Nevertheless, the combination of military exercises, activities in relation to the war in Ukraine and, particularly, the intervention in Syria indicates that the Russian armed forces are already substantially transformed.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Rassirennoe zasedaniye kollegi Ministerstvo Oboroni' [Expanded Meeting of the Ministry of Defence Staff], 11 December 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president.news/50913>.

¹⁰⁸ Tsybal, V. and Zatselin, V. (2015), 'A New Russian National Defence Control System: Reform of Imitation?', *Russian Economic Developments*, No. 5, 27 May 2015, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2611221.

¹⁰⁹ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Soveshaniye po voprosam razvitiya Vooruzhonnnykh Sil' [Meeting on the Development of the Armed Forces], 12 November 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/keywords/91/events/50675>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid; RT (2014), 'DM Shoigu asks Putin to launch obligatory military training for all Russian governors'. Khoroshavin was subsequently arrested on 4 March 2015 after being accused of taking bribes.

¹¹¹ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), 'Rassirennoe zasedaniye kollegi Ministerstvo Oborony' [Expanded Meeting of the Ministry of Defence Staff], 19 December 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47257>.

¹¹² Ibid. The Syria operations have included a wide range of activities, from the large-scale movement of cargo – 214 tonnes lifted in two months by military transport aviation and maritime transport vessels – to thousands of tactical strikes and cruise strikes, launched in long-distance aviation bombing raids, from surface vessels in the Caspian Sea and from submarines in the Mediterranean.

5. Facing a Turbulent Time: Mobilization, with Difficulty

Gerasimov's brief discussion of mobilization in his February 2013 article has been almost entirely overlooked in the Western debate about Russian actions. Yet it is revealing, and offers a means of understanding the thinking of the Russian leadership and its actions during the past five years, and the direction in which it is taking Russia. Indeed, the 'Gerasimov doctrine' is best understood as a portent not of 'hybrid' warfare, but of *Russian state mobilization*. It discussed moving the economy on to a war footing, and pointed to the discussion of mobilization as preparedness, even *readiness*, proceeding *before* the outbreak of war.

At heart, Russian state mobilization is, in effect, grand strategy in emergency circumstances. Its implementation reflects a deliberate attempt to generate power and an acknowledgment of the problems that Moscow faces, both in terms of a complex and potentially hostile international environment and the dysfunctionalities of the Russian system. Mobilization is also about conceptualizing contemporary and future war, and preparing for the many and multifaceted challenges it poses. In current circumstances, this means both military combat readiness and the resilience and coordination of the wider system, including the MVD, security and investigation services, and other ministries.

Where are we, then, in terms of Russian mobilization? Given the definitions above, it appears that the Russian leadership is currently operating in the 'mobilization preparation' phase. It is taking measures to mobilize the economy, armed forces and state institutions, including explicitly stated actions to prepare Russia for the transition to war. In this it is moving towards a 'mobilization readiness' framework. In early 2014 Gerasimov stated that the General Staff had received additional powers for the coordination of federal organs, and that, 'just in case', a range of measures had been developed to 'prepare the country for the transition to conditions of war'.¹¹³ Putin had used the same terminology following the Zapad-2013 exercises, and even earlier.¹¹⁴

This process has been under way for some time. If many in the West see relations with Russia in a post-Ukraine, post-2014 context, the Russian leadership is operating in a longer time frame that, though it has roots stretching back over a decade, is perhaps best depicted as a post-Arab Spring context. It is worth restating Gerasimov's line in his article in February 2013 that 'mobilization and concentration is not part of the period after the onset of the state of war, as in 1914, but rather *unnoticed, proceeds long before that*'.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Newsru* (2014), 'Genshtab poluchil dopolnitelniye polnomochiya, podgotovil lan perekhoda RF na usloviye voennovo vremeni' [The Chief of Staff has received additional powers, prepared a plan for transitioning the Russian Federation to war conditions], 25 January 2014, www.newsru.com/arch/russia/25jan2014/genshtab.html.

¹¹⁴ "Zapad-2013" – pervye vyvody' ["Zapad-2013" – Initial Conclusions]. The author is grateful to Johan Norberg for bringing this to his attention.

¹¹⁵ Gerasimov (2013), 'Tsennost nauki v predvidenniye'.

In conclusion, Russian state mobilization has gone through a dual evolution. Unlike in 1914, when it took place at and after the outbreak of hostilities, mobilization now takes place *before* the outbreak of hostilities. Moreover, although this point appears to be still under debate in Russia, it is no longer about mobilizing the nation, *levée en masse* style, but about attempting to create sufficient strength in the system, including a substantial professional armed force at constant readiness and able to defend the state's interests, even to wage war, without making major demands on the population. Despite the unresolved debate, the leadership appears to see state mobilization no longer in terms of mass mobilization, the 'nation in arms' approach, and instead in terms of the 'nation armed'.

But it remains a difficult process, and one still under way. Putin has suggested that 'some of our partners – competitors, you could say, already call our armed forces effective ... but we still have much to do'.¹¹⁶ This reflects the point that mobilization entails both the modernization of the armed forces and the resolution of other problems (some of them long-standing), such as those created by Russia's geography and its Soviet inheritance, and those relating to speed of response to the outbreak of war and how the state makes demands of the population.

In many ways, the current Russian leadership is still simultaneously grappling with versions of the 'mobilization gap' and the balance between the 'two armies' question. The modernization of equipment and the intense, extended period of no-notice exercises are clearly having some positive effect in reducing the 'mobilization gap'. Armed forces can now respond more effectively in strategic terms across the Russian Federation (and beyond), deploying forces over great distances at considerable speed.

At the same time, there are ongoing problems in procurement (leading to delays and postponements), force structure and, perhaps, data preparation and planning. Debates are ongoing about how best to address Russian security, particularly between those who emphasize the professionalization of the armed forces – which would place less of a burden on the population – and those who argue for the development and nurturing of a large reserve cadre that would give Russia an advantage in a long war, particularly with Western forces. This lack of consensus hampers effective implementation of reforms. It complicates the balancing of the armed forces between, on the one hand, professional constant-readiness elements and, on the other, older forms of national-mass-mobilization force.

It is also worth asking whether this mobilization is sustainable – or will economic recession force Moscow to scale down its ambition? On current evidence, despite economic stagnation and some budget cuts, the answer is that for the foreseeable future, it will be sustained. In large part this is because the Russian leadership sees the need for continued pressure on the system to protect Russian sovereignty against both immediate and longer-term threats, real and perceived. Security trumps economic efficiency.

¹¹⁶ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2014), 'Rassirennoe zasedaniye kollegi Ministerstvo Oborony' [Expanded Meeting of the Ministry of Defence Staff], 19 December 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47257>.

In July 2015, Putin stated that:

... recent events show that we cannot hope that some of our geopolitical opponents will change their hostile course any time in the foreseeable future ... we must respond accordingly to this situation ... and take additional systemic measures in all key areas ... [to] preserve our country's social, political and economic stability. Much here will depend on consolidating the efforts of our state institutions and civil society and concentrating resources in priority areas.¹¹⁷

The imperative to sustain these measures is even stronger given the parliamentary elections scheduled for September this year. In February 2016, Putin and Sergei Ivanov spoke to the security services and the Investigative Committee, urging them to prevent attempts from outside to intervene in Russia's political life, particularly regarding the upcoming elections. 'Our ill-wishers abroad,' Putin suggested, 'are preparing for these elections, and everyone should therefore be aware that we will defend our interests with determination and in accordance with our laws.'¹¹⁸ This context informed the establishment in April of a National Guard, an organization that draws together MVD troops, special forces, and other units and assets. Led by Viktor Zolotov, the National Guard reports directly to Putin. It appears to have been established to counter terrorism and extremism and to suppress unauthorized mass demonstrations.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, although Putin has stated that Russia does not intend to become involved in an arms race, and that the arms programme was set in motion years ago before the war in Ukraine, the evident pressure on the system suggests that there is some emphasis on such a race, at least on the importance of not falling behind other major powers.

While the budget is undoubtedly under pressure, the leadership is also exerting its own pressure on the system to seek to make it effective. Not all of this will bear fruit in the immediate future. But even if small cuts in defence spending are implemented, much money has already been spent, and new equipment supplied; the effects of this are likely to continue to percolate through, supplemented by the benefits of and lessons learnt from military exercises. Russia's security apparatus and armed forces still face a range of problems, but are well on the way to being transformed. To paraphrase a Russian saying, this may not be pretty (or efficient), but it is likely to be (broadly) effective.

What does this mean for the West? What implications does it have? Discussion of mobilization helps to sharpen the broader Western debate about Russia. It supplements the wider discussion about mobilization as a popular or patriotic question. While this is important, it misses some of the defining features of state mobilization, and of the state's effort to invigorate the system. It also supplements the Western discussion of Russian so-called 'hybrid warfare' by adding emphasis on both the consolidation of Russian state power and the development and deployment of conventional force. Indeed, given the changes taking place, it is perhaps now time to supersede thinking about Russian 'hybrid warfare' and focus more on state mobilization and its implications.

¹¹⁷ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2015), 'Zasedaniye sovetu bezopasnosti' [Meeting of the Security Council], 3 July 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49862>.

¹¹⁸ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2016), 'Zasedaniye kollegi Federalnoi sluzhby bezopasnosti' [Meeting of the Federal Security Service Staff], 26 February 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51397>; Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2016), 'Sergei Ivanov prinyal uchastiye v zasedaniye kollegi Sledstvennovo komiteta' [Sergei Ivanov participated in the meeting of the Investigative Committee], 26 February 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/administration/51396>.

¹¹⁹ Tass News (2016), 'Kremlin: National Guard Likely to be Involved in Suppression of Unauthorised Mass Actions', 5 April 2016, <http://tass.ru/en/politics/867506>.

A gap is clearly emerging between how the West and Russia see the international environment and how each is responding to it. One US observer has noted that ‘while the US military is cutting back on heavy conventional capabilities, Russia is looking at a similar future operational environment, and doubling down on hers’.¹²⁰ This is emphasized by equipment gaps in other areas, such as electronic warfare. It is also important to note that while Western militaries have been engaged in low-intensity counter-insurgency-type warfare for much of the past 15 years, Russia has recently been deploying high-intensity firepower.

This latter point has ramifications for grasping Russia’s evolution over the next two to three years, as the various elements of mobilization – particularly as they relate to the military – come to fruition. This means three things. First, in current circumstances, much of the Russian outlook is strategically defensive. The leadership is attempting to implement measures that will enable Russia to be self-reliant and sovereign at a time of predicted international turbulence.

Second, as the Russian system transforms, ‘defensive actions’ will evolve in their nature, incorporating deterrence of other major powers, particularly the US-led West, and the prevention of colour revolution in Russia. Indeed, they are already evolving, and may be understood to include power projection to prevent developments further afield that would impinge on Russian interests more broadly defined. Syria is a prime example: Russia has intervened with the ‘sole aim’, Putin has suggested, of stabilizing states and regions.¹²¹ On another occasion, he has suggested that Russia’s ‘mistakes’ have included its failure to assert its national interests, or to assert its objections to developments in Iraq, Libya and some other countries, ‘while we should have done that from the outset. Then the world could have been more balanced’.¹²² Predicting with any certainty how conflict evolves is fraught with difficulty, but it may well be that as Russia’s capabilities increase, the leadership will ‘learn from its mistakes’ and intervene to prevent the collapse of states and regions where it sees signs of ‘colour revolution’. This is particularly relevant in the former Soviet space.

Third, Russian state mobilization illustrates Moscow’s response to its (often-stated) concerns that force plays an increasingly important role in international affairs. The ability to deploy force is understood as a central part of policy. This relates directly to the vexed question of NATO–Russia relations and their evolution over the next two to three years. The relationship is beset by chronic tensions, several of which, such as NATO enlargement and ballistic missile defence, are likely to be inflamed by NATO’s Warsaw summit scheduled for July this year. Western thinking about Russia should be focused, therefore, on where Russia will be in the period 2017–20, rather than where it was last year or even where it is now. This means shaping a coherent set of policies to deal with an increasingly muscular Russia, in the contexts both of Russia’s long-term disagreement with the West and of its increasingly sensitive responses to potential threats.

The West can do little to alter or reduce this mobilization preparation in Russia. In part, that is because mobilization preparation is intended to meet what the Russian leadership sees as Russian domestic problems and weaknesses. In part, it is also because the world is seen so differently in

¹²⁰ Bartles, C. (2016), ‘Getting Gerasimov Right’, *Military Review*, pp. 36–37.

¹²¹ Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2016), ‘Zasedaniye kollegi Federarlnoi sluzhby bezopasnosti’, [Meeting of the Federal Security Service Staff], 26 February 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51397>.

¹²² Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation (2016), ‘Intervyu Nemetskomu izdaniyu Bild. Chast 1’ [Interview to the German Newspaper *Bild*: Part 1], 11 January 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51154>.

Moscow, and mitigating Russian concerns would mean the West implementing policies – such as the ‘retirement’ of NATO – that are likely to be unpalatable to Western leaders.

Nevertheless, some things can be done. A further enhanced understanding of Russia is necessary – particularly in terms of more (and better coordinated) resources being dedicated to grasping the nature of the economic, military and security situation in Russia. This would contribute to a more nuanced and sophisticated Western debate about deterrence and dialogue, one that would eschew the current binary distinction between the need for policies of ‘either’ deterrence ‘or’ dialogue, while at the same time improving communication between the West and Russia. Currently, it seems that Western leaderships are unable to interpret Russian signalling correctly – hence the constant sense of surprise – and are also unable to send the right signals to Moscow. Perhaps most importantly, a more sophisticated Western understanding of mobilization – and what it means for Russian policy-makers and planners in a variety of contexts – would make it easier for governments and militaries to shape coherent and realistic plans for dealing with Russia in the medium term.

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Russia's top military officials hold a press conference on Syria at the National Defence Control Centre of the Russian Federation in Moscow on 2 December 2015.

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